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Parental Involvement Strongly Impacts Student Achievement, New Research Finds

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EDITORS AND REPORTERS: Karen Smith Conway can be reached for interviews at karen.conway@unh.edu. The full study is available at http://www.unh.edu/news/docs/Conway_May08.pdf.

DURHAM, N.H. - New research from the University of New Hampshire shows that students do much better in school when their parents are actively involved in their education.

Researchers Karen Smith Conway, professor of economics at the University of New Hampshire, and her colleague Andrew Houtenville, senior research associate at New Editions Consulting, found that parental involvement has a strong, positive effect on student achievement.

The research is reported in "Parental Effort, School Resources, and Student Achievement," which appears in the spring 2008 issue of the *Journal of Human Resources*.

"Parental effort is consistently associated with higher levels of achievement, and the magnitude of the effect of parental effort is substantial. We found that schools would need to increase per-pupil spending by more than \$1,000 in order to achieve the same results that are gained with parental involvement," Conway said.

Parents seemed particularly interested in the academic achievements of their daughters. The researchers found parents spent more time talking to their daughters about their school work during dinnertime discussions.

1. "There are a number of theories about why girls seem to garner more attention from their parents than boys. One possibility is that girls are more communicative with their parents so these conversations about academics are easier for parents to have with their daughters," Conway said.

The researchers also found that parents may reduce their efforts when school resources increase, thus diminishing the effects of improved school resources.

1. "As an economist, I look for reactions to a specific action so it is not surprising to me that parents may scale back their involvement with their child's education when a school adds resources. As a result, increasing school resources may not be as effective as we expect since they may diminish parental involvement," Conway said.

The researchers used national data from more than 10,000 eighth-grade students in public and private schools, their parents, teachers, and school administrators. The researchers were particularly interested in how frequently parents discussed activities or events of particular interest to the child, discussed things the child studied in class, discussed selecting courses or programs at school, attended a school meeting, and volunteered at the child's school.

To evaluate school resources, the researchers looked at per-pupil expenditures on instructional salaries and a set of five school characteristics: student-teacher ratio, lowest salary received by a teacher, percentage of teachers with a master's or a doctoral degree, percentage of the student body not in the school's subsidized lunch program, and percentage of nonminority students in the student body.

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